

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BERLIN 02413 01 OF 03 080838Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 02413

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, BQG, GE
SUBJECT: DISSENT IN THE GDR: THE CASE OF NICO HUEBNER

REF: USBER 0730 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION IN THE WEST BERLIN
AND WEST GERMAN PRESS IN RECENT DAYS HAS FOCUSED
ON THE CASE OF NICO HUEBNER, A TWENTY-TWO YEAR OLD EAST
BERLINER ARRESTED MARCH 14 FOR REFUSAL TO BE INDUCTED INTO
THE EAST GERMAN ARMY. HIS PUBLIC EXPLANATION FOR THIS
ACTION IS THAT BERLIN IS ONE CITY, DEMILITARIZED UNDER THE
TERMS OF THE POTSDAM AGREEMENT, AND THAT THEREFORE HE, AS
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PAGE 02 BERLIN 02413 01 OF 03 080838Z

A CITIZEN OF "BERLIN", CANNOT BE DRAFTED INTO THE GDR
ARMED FORCES (SEE REFTEL). MOST OF THE WEST GERMAN MEDIA
COVERAGE OF HUEBNER'S CASE, AND ESPECIALLY THAT OF THE
SPRINGER PRESS, HAS CONCENTRATED ON THE BERLIN ASPECTS
AND ON DEMANDS THAT THE WESTERN ALLIES DO SOMETHING AS
PROTECTING POWERS IN BERLIN TO ASSIST HUEBNER.

HOWEVER, HUEBNER IS ALSO OF INTEREST AS AN EAST GERMAN DISSIDENT PER SE, AND ESPECIALLY BECAUSE HE IS IN SOME WAYS TYPICAL, IN SOME WAYS NOT, OF MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GDR. HE ALSO HOLDS VIEWS WHICH WE FEEL ARE INCREASINGLY SEPARATING YOUNGER DISSIDENTS IN THIS COUNTRY FROM THE MORE FAMOUS OLDER GENERATION OF INTERNAL CRITICS; VIEWS SUCH AS REJECTION OF SOCIALISM AS A THEORY AND A DOCTRINE, A HIGH LEVEL OF SKEPTICISM CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR "HUMANIZING" SOCIALISM, AND A CONTEMPT FOR THE ATTEMPTS OF THEIR ELDERS TO TINKER WITH THE SYSTEM AS OPPOSED TO REJECTING IT OUTRIGHT. END SUMMARY.

2. HUEBNER'S BACKGROUND. HUEBNER'S VIEWS ARE CONTAINED IN A PERSONAL STATEMENT PRINTED IN THE WEST GERMAN PAPERS DIE ZEIT AND DIE WELT ON MARCH 31 (AND BROADCAST IN FULL TO EAST GERMAN LISTENERS VIA RIAS). AN EMBASSY OFFICER HAS ALSO DISCUSSED HUEBNER AT LENGTH WITH A FORMER CLASSMATE WHO CLAIMS TO KNOW HIM WELL AND TO UNDERSTAND HIS MOTIVATIONS IN PROVOKING HIS OWN ARREST. IN SUM: HUEBNER COMES FROM A GOOD SED FAMILY, BOTH PARENTS BEING LONG-TIME PARTY MEMBERS. HIS FATHER, 52, IS AN ECONOMIST AT THE KARL-MARX PARTY HIGH SCHOOL ATTACHED TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE SED. HIS MOTHER IS AN EDITOR OF CHILDRENS' PROGRAMMING FOR BERLIN RADIO. HUEBNER WAS BROUGHT UP AS A "YOUNG PIONEER" AND AS A MEMBER OF THE FREE GERMAN YOUTH (FDJ), BUT IN HIS MID-TEENS BECAME TOTALLY DISCONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BERLIN 02413 01 OF 03 080838Z

ENCHANTED WITH THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SOCIALISM IN THE GDR. MAKING NO SECRET OF HIS CHANGING VIEWS, HE WAS EXPELLED FROM THE FDJ AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN AND WAS SIMULTANEOUSLY DEPRIVED OF HIS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION PAPERS AND ISSUED A SO-CALLED "PM-12" WHICH INDICATES THAT HE WAS SUSPECT AND NOT TO BE PERMITTED TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE GDR, INCLUDING TO OTHER SOCIALIST STATES. HUEBNER REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN PRE-MILITARY TRAINING AND DEVELOPED WHAT HE CLAIMED TO BE PACIFIST VIEWS. AS A RESULT HE EVIDENTLY BECAME ALMOST UNEMPLOYABLE. (DURING THIS PERIOD HIS RELATIONS WITH HIS PARENTS BECAME, WE ARE TOLD, VIRTUALLY INTOLERABLE.) IN 1977 HE APPLIED TO STUDY HEBREW AT THE THEOLOGY FACULTY OF HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY, WAS INITIALLY ACCEPTED BUT WAS OFFICIALLY INFORMED IN NOVEMBER 1977 THAT HE WAS FORBIDDEN FROM CONTINUING FURTHER STUDIES. ON MARCH 5, 1978, HE SIGNED A PUBLIC STATEMENT CONDEMNING DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION. SINCE HE HAD TWICE IN FEBRUARY REFUSED HIS PRE-INDUCTION PHYSICAL EXAM, HE WAS ARRESTED BY THE VOLKSPOLIZEI ON MARCH 14. BEFORE HIS ARREST, HOWEVER, HE HAD ARRANGED FOR DOCUMENTS ARGUING AGAINST THE RIGHT OF THE GDR TO DRAFT HIM, AS WELL AS HIS LONGER PERSONAL "STATEMENT", TO BE SMUGGLED TO THE

WEST.

3. ACCORDING TO A FORMER CLASSMATE, HUEBNER HAD APPLIED TO EMIGRATE TO THE WEST (AS IS MOST OBVIOUS FROM HIS "STATEMENT"), HAD BEEN REFUSED, AND HAD THEN RESOLVED TO FORCE HIS OWN ARREST IN THE HOPE OF BEING RANSOMED OUT OF THE GDR BY THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. IT WAS WITH THIS LATTER INTENT IN MIND, AS WELL AS TO GIVE HIS VIEWS BROADER ATTENTION GENERALLY, THAT HUEBNER SENT WEST THE DOCUMENTS WHICH HAVE ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THE WEST GERMAN PRESS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BERLIN 02413 02 OF 03 080534Z

ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BERLIN 02413

WE ARE NOT ABLE TO JUDGE THE RELIABILITY OF OUR SOURCE FOR THIS INFORMATION. HOWEVER, HE APPEARS TO BE SINCERELY INTERESTED IN HUEBNER AND GENUINELY WORRIED WHEN TOLD THAT THE SPRINGER PRESS IS MAKING THE CASE INTO SOMETHING OF A CAUSE CELEBRE BY DEMANDING ACTION BY THE WESTERN ALLIES.

4. HUEBNER'S VIEW OF EAST GERMAN SOCIETY. DESPITE THE INDIVIDUALITY OF HUEBNER'S "STATEMENT" (AND IT REQUIRES

SOME INDIVIDUALITY TO PROVOKE YOUR OWN ARREST IN THE GDR), IT CONSTITUTES AN INTERESTING VIEW OF EAST GERMAN SOCIETY AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A YOUTHFUL DISSIDENT. HUEBNER BEGINS BY QUESTIONING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE SED REGIME IN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BERLIN 02413 02 OF 03 080534Z

THE GDR AND ASSERTS THAT THE UNREMITTINGLY IDEOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM THE NURSERY LEVEL ON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR A "DESTRUCTIVE NIHILISM" AMONG GDR YOUTH. HE FINDS VIRTUE IN CHURCH YOUTH GROUPS WHICH PROVIDE A NON-IDEOLOGICAL SETTING FOR DISCUSSION AND SEEK TO PROVIDE A MORAL BASE FOR THEIR MEMBERS. HE FEELS THAT EUROCOMMUNISTS WHO CRITICIZE THE GDR REGIME DO NOT RECOGNIZE THAT THE FAULTS OF THE REGIME ARE INHERENT IN THE SYSTEM AND ITS THEORY AND THAT IF THE REGIME CRITICS WHO WANT TO "HUMANIZE" THE GDR EVER CAME TO POWER THEY WOULD BUILD "A MORE OR LESS DICTATORIAL REGIME". HUEBNER SAYS THAT NORMAL EAST GERMANS TURN AUTOMATICALLY TO WESTERN BROADCASTS FOR INFORMATION BUT THAT THIS OUTSIDE NEWS IS NOT RELEVANT TO THEIR OWN LIVES. HE SAYS THAT WHEN AN INHABITANT OF THE GDR DETERMINES TO LEAVE FOR THE WEST HE FINDS THAT HE "IS A GERMAN BUT A GERMAN OF A PARTICULAR KIND" WHO IS THEN SUBJECT TO DAILY HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION IN JOB, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONTACTS. MANY EAST GERMANS, HE SAYS, WHO DISLIKE THE SYSTEM ARE AFRAID TO MAKE A NEW LIFE IN THE WEST AND RETREAT INTO MONEY-MAKING AND SKEPTICISM. HOWEVER, HE (HUEBNER), GUIDED BY THE "OBJECTIVE-PESSIMISTIC STAND-POINT" OF SCHOPENHAUER, "WILL NOT KNEEL TO A SYSTEM WHICH CAN RETAIN POWER ONLY THROUGH TOTAL MANIPULATION OF BELIEF, THROUGH SPYING ON THOSE WHO THINK DIFFERENTLY, THROUGH BLACKMAIL AND SLANDER." (EMBASSY IS SENDING A MORE DETAILED SUMMARY OF HUEBNER'S "STATEMENT" VIA AIRGRAM.)

5. DOES HUEBNER SPEAK FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION? HUEBNER'S PUBLISHED STATEMENT IS INTERESTING IN THAT IT REFLECTS SOME THEMES FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED WHEN TALKING WITH YOUNG EAST GERMANS OF THE "DISSIDENT" VARIETY: REJECTION OF MUCH OF THE UNDERLYING THEORY OF SOCIALISM, CONTEMPT FOR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE PRACTICE OF SOCIALISM CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BERLIN 02413 02 OF 03 080534Z

IN THE GDR, AND A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING FOR THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVES OF THEIR PARENTS. IT IS CERTAINLY NOT DIFFICULT TO SEE IN HUEBNER'S WORDS A GENERATION GAP OF A PERSONAL, AS WELL AS SOCIETAL, CHARACTER. HOWEVER, IN OUR JUDGMENT, SOME OF HIS CONCERNS ARE NOT TYPICAL OF MANY

YOUNG EAST GERMANS. HIS INTEREST IN THE CHURCH IS SHARED BY MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED; BUT ACTIVE INTEREST IN THE CHURCH AND MEMBERSHIP IN CHURCH YOUTH GROUPS IS CLEARLY INVOLVE ONLY A FRACTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY. SECOND, HIS INTEREST IN BERLIN AS ONE CITY AND HIS DESIRE TO SEE THE "BLOODY BORDER THROUGH GERMANY" REMOVED ARE NOT TYPICAL OF YOUNG EAST GERMANS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN. PERHAPS THESE INTERESTS WOULD BE OF MORE PROMINENT CONCERN IF YOUNG PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY WERE POSSIBLE OR RELEVANT TO THEIR OWN LIVES; HOWEVER, OUR IMPRESSION IS STRONG THAT YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GDR ACCEPT THE DIVISION OF GERMANY AND OF BERLIN AS CONSTANTS AND ASSUME THAT THEY WILL REMAIN SO. THIRD, WHILE SKEPTICISM, PESSIMISM, AND PERSONAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE DEMANDS OF A SOCIALIST SOCIETY ARE VERY COMMON IN GDR YOUTH, HUEBNER'S ELABORATE RATIONALISATION, HIS INTEREST IN SCHOPENHAUER FOR EXAMPLE, STRIKE US AS VERY UNTYPICAL OF GDR YOUTH. MOST OF HUEBNER'S PEERS SEEM FAR MORE INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING A NEW PAIR OF JEANS OR A CURRENT ROCK RECORDING THAN COPIES OF THE CLASSICS.

6. COMMENT: IN SEVERAL PUBLISHED ARTICLES AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES IN RECENT MONTHS, AND IN CONVERSATIONS WITH A NUMBER OF OUR EAST GERMAN CONTACTS, WE HAVE NOTED A DISTINCT HARDENING OF THE GDR POSITION ON THE TREATMENT OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND A GENERAL INCREASE IN THE ATTENTION GIVEN BY THE AUTHORITIES TO PRE-MILITARY TRAINING, PARA-MILITARY FORCES, CIVIL DEFENSE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

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PAGE 01 BERLIN 02413 03 OF 03 080534Z
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 BERLIN 02413

THE ARMED FORCES. HOWEVER, WHILE HUEBNER CLAIMS TO BE A PACIFIST HE DID NOT, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, CLAIM EXEMPTION FROM INDUCTION INTO THE VOLKSARMEE ON THAT BASIS. WHILE COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE IN THE GDR APPEARS, BASED ON OUR LIMITED CONTACTS WITH YOUNG EAST GERMANS, TO BE REGARDED WITH DISTASTE BY MOST DRAFTEES, WE WOULD JUDGE THAT FEW, IF ANY, WOULD EMULATE HUEBNER IN HIS "DEMILITARIZED CITY OF BERLIN" RATIONALE TO ESCAPE SERVICE. WHETHER NICO HUEBNER BECOMES A GENUINE CAUSE CELEBRE, LIKE BAHRO, BIERMANN AN HAVEMANN, DEPENDS IN THE MAIN ON THE VAGARIES (AND MOTIVES) OF THE WEST GERMAN PRESS. SO FAR, WE HAVE NOT NOTICED ANY GROUNDSWELL OF INTEREST IN HIS CASE AS SUCH IN THE GDR, BUT THE INCIDENT IS STILL VERY FRESH. HE WAS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BERLIN 02413 03 OF 03 080534Z

NOT WELL-KNOWN AT THE TIME OF HIS ARREST AND IS A MEMBER OF PROBABLY THE LEAST COHESIVE GROUP IN EAST GERMAN SOCIETY, YOUTH. IF HE DOES DEVELOP AN APPEAL WITHIN EAST GERMAN SOCIETY, HOWEVER, WE SUSPECT THAT HIS ARGUMENTS WILL FIND THEIR RESPONSE WITH HUEBNER'S PEERS IN AGE AND NOT WITH HIS ELDERS. BOLEN

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